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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/21/2016
TAGS: PREL PTER TU IZ
SUBJECT: KURDS WANT TO RESOLVE THE PKK PROBLEM

REF: ANKARA 4163

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Talabani understands the seriousness of situation with Turkey. He and Barzani are in agreement on steps show Iraqi-Kurdish bona fides. In addition to steps aimed at stopping PKK attacks on Turkish targets, he believes that progress toward a comprehensive solution could be achieved if the Turks are willing to consider a political approach.

¶2. (S) On July 21 Ambassador spoke twice to President Talabani on the need to address growing Turkish impatience with PKK attacks on Turkish targets. Talabani already had been briefed by a PUK representative in Ankara on the state of play with the Turks. He understood the seriousness of the situation and said Iraq needed to take steps to prevent cross-border Turkish military operations. He relayed that the Iranians had just bombed a PKK target on the border the previous day. He said that he has proposed to KRG President Barzani that they must approach the PKK and warn them to stop as they are undermining broader Kurdish interests. PKK is behaving like Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Kurds could not afford to deal with an Israeli-style Turkish solution.

¶3. (S) In a follow on conversation, Talabani reported to the Ambassador that he and KRG President Barzani had spoken and were in complete agreement on what they are ready to do prevent Turkish cross-border operations in northern Iraq.

--They are sending an emissary to PKK leaders to urge that they accept an immediate, unilateral ceasefire.

--Peshmerga forces will deploy within the vicinity of the PKK forces, but they will not confront them. This will send a strong message to the PKK.

--They will close all the PKK-front offices (Kurdish Democratic Solution Party) in Kurdistan, Kirkuk, Mosul, and Baghdad. (Talabani informed the Ambassador that Prime Minister Maliki made the decision ordering the Interior Minister to close these offices).

--The KDP and PUK will send a joint delegation to Ankara immediately. Their message would be that Barzani and Talabani are friends of the Turks and see the PKK as terrorists. They want to help, as these steps demonstrate, but need the Turks to understand that there must be a political solution on offer if a lasting solution to the PKK problem can be found. If the Turks undertook military action across the border, it would make it much harder for the KDP-PUK to help.

--KDP and PUK agree to trilateral talks as soon as possible.

--If the PKK continues to attack Turkish targets, they will be told that the Peshmerga will essentially cordon them off to prevent them from dispersing into Kurdistan.

--Talabani intended to convey these points to the Turkish Charge today. (He later told the Ambassador that he did so).

--Talabani told the Ambassador that Iran was fanning the flames of conflict. The Iranian Ambassador in Ankara allegedly asked in a public statement for Turkey to send forces to northern Iraq and said that Iran is willing to facilitate such a move. (Talabani summoned the Iranian Ambassador to explain this today).

¶4. (S) Talabani told the Ambassador that the Kurds have to offer a political way ahead for dealing with the PKK. If the Turks restored the earlier TNIO offer, he thought the PKK problem could be solved very quickly. He said the Turks should be advised to allow Ocalan to be in touch with his key deputies so that he could encourage them to accept a political resolution. On Makhmur refugee camp, he said it was not technically in Kurdistan, but in Mosul. It was a UNHCR problem and received funding from the Swedes - we should go talk to them. Talabani also said Barham Salih will work on identifying a non-Kurdish Iraqi point of contact on this issue.

KHALILZAD